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T H I R D

A N N U A L R E P O R T

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Presented to the City Council, March 31, 1855.  
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New-Bedford:

E. ANTHONY, PRINTER TO THE CITY.

1855.

R E P O R T .

*To the Mayor and Aldermen, and the Common Council
of the City of New Bedford :*

GENTLEMEN :

IN accordance with the Ordinance for the establishment of the Free Public Library, the Trustees of that Institution, respectfully lay before you their Third Annual Report.

To the two former Reports of the Board, the members of the City Government are respectfully referred, for such details of its history and progress as will enable them to judge of its character, and of its value and position as one of the established instrumentalities of our municipal arrangements for the promotion of the well being of the people.

The legislative and municipal action which gave a legal position to this interesting and valuable institution ; the activity and liberality which so prominently distinguished the movement by which the valuable property of the Old Social Library became the founda-

tion of the new establishment ; the measures taken by the first Board of Trustees, to place the Library upon a broad and reliable foundation ; the rules and regulations instituted by them, and which have with the sanction of the City government, continued to guide the action of all concerned with the Library ; the encouraging circumstances of our first years' experience, and the details of our financial operations and estimates which have resulted in a generous and adequate provision for its support,—all these facts and circumstances are to be found in the previous reports, which it has been the duty and the privilege of this Board to place before the members of the City Government.

In the last Annual Report, the Trustees thus concisely and comprehensively set forth their views and opinions in relation to the Institution under their charge :

“ We have by the experience of a period long enough to confirm every anticipation and dispel every doubt, demonstrated the practicability and the utility of a Free Public Library.

“ To repeat the words of the former Board—‘ Our Library has become one of the institutions of the city.’

“ It has become a valuable, and will soon be generally considered as an indispensable auxiliary in the great work of popular education.

“ It has become incorporated, both in idea and in fact, into the catalogue of subjects demanding the fostering care and annual support of the municipal government.

“ Its claims for such attention and support, are founded upon principles which lie at the foundation of our republican institutions.

“ To train and enlighten the public mind is a work

to which a liberal portion of the public wealth must be devoted; and as being in harmony with this idea, and as the cap-stone of our beautiful system of public education, the Public Library has claims upon all whose aim is the promotion of the general welfare.

“Such was the theory when the work was begun by the State and completed by the City—such is now the *fact*, demonstrated by our experience, and placed beyond the reach of doubt or cavil.

“Upon the minds of the Trustees, the result to which we have arrived, after the operations of the year, have produced the most undoubting conviction that the Free Public Library is an instrumentality from which our community are deriving great and enduring advantages.

“We would give our most unqualified sanction to the principle upon which it is established and sustained.

“We hereby bear testimony to the practicability of the plan of its operation.

“We would with the earnestness of a strong desire and a most thorough conviction, lay before you the claims of the institution to your continued attention and liberal support.

“Its reputable and profitable support demands but a small pecuniary outlay; and it is confidently believed that from no portion of our annual appropriations of an equal amount will the people derive more satisfactory and enduring advantages.

“The establishment of a Free Public Library, by the municipal authorities of New Bedford—the pioneer undertaking of the Commonwealth—has conferred an honorable distinction upon our beloved city; a distinction which it is hoped and believed we shall con-

tinue to deserve, by giving it an enlightened and liberal support."

After the experience of another year, the foregoing statements, which we have taken from the reports of our immediate predecessors in office, continue to be, in their fullest extent, applicable to the Free Public Library.

We have incorporated them into our report, and now respectfully present them to you, as a plain and reliable statement of facts, and as embracing the views and opinions of those who have, during the past year, been by you placed in charge of the institution.

Nothing has occurred, since this important trust has been committed to our hands, to lead us to doubt the wisdom of the principle upon which it is founded, or weaken our confidence in the practicability of the plan of its operations. Our confidence in both remains unimpaired. In its principles, it is in harmony with the great facts which lie at the foundation of the people's progress and prosperity; and the almost un-hoped for, and certainly unlooked for success which has attended its operations, from the opening of its doors to the present moment, has given to the principle the support of experience, and caused it to stand firm in the position in which it has been placed by the wise liberality of the City Council.

The Library statistics fully sustain the opinions we have advanced.

Twenty-one thousand and forty-one books were taken from the Library during the year ending March 4th.

The number of new cards issued during the year is *eight hundred and ten.*

The whole number of cards issued, is *three thousand one hundred and eighty-three.*

The number of books out, *eleven hundred*.

A recent examination of the Library has disclosed the gratifying fact, that at the time it was made, but *sixty volumes* were missing of the large number which has been placed upon its shelves. This favorable result was unexpected by the Trustees. They had feared, that the constant and almost unrestricted access allowed to the books; the universality of the right of "taking" allowed by the regulations, and the large number of persons who, at certain times are found crowded into our limited apartments, waiting their turn to be served by the Librarian, would have led to a much greater loss than was shown by the examination.

Taking into view all the circumstances of the case, such a result, after more than two years' operations, must be, it is believed, looked upon by you, as it has been by us, as exhibiting an aspect of security connected with this part of the public property satisfactory to its guardians, and creditable to the people. It shows that we have not been mistaken in the belief, that they could safely be entrusted with the custody of their own property. It gives unquestionable evidence of the fact, that the two fundamental rules set forth by a former Board, as those upon which the Library could alone securely rest—USE CAREFULLY, RETURN PROMPTLY—have been heeded and observed. We would earnestly express the hope that in this respect the future may be as the past. While we are thus encouraged by the past, we cannot but feel solicitous for the future; and under the influence of this deep solicitude, we would, with a clear conviction of their vital character, renew the caution and admonitions of our predecessors. We feel it to be our duty again to

impress upon the minds of all the takers of books from the Library, the important fact, that "THE RULES MUST BE OBSERVED, OR DISORDER, DECAY AND DISSOLUTION WILL SOON ATTEND UPON THIS ENLIGHTENED AND PRAISEWORTHY EFFORT TO OPEN TO THE PEOPLE THE AVENUES TO A MORE EXTENSIVE AND GENIAL CULTURE."

The past history and present position of the Library warrant the conclusion that its prosperity will continue to be an object of interest and attention to the City Government. It is therefore the duty of those who are from time to time entrusted with its management, to make such suggestions and recommendations to the authorities as may aid them in their efforts so to order their action in relation to it, that the object of its establishment may be most effectually attained.

To the argument by which the policy and legality of the appropriation last year made for its support was sustained, we have nothing to add. To our minds it is satisfactory and conclusive. That it was so viewed by the Council is evident from the fact that the appropriation recommended was cheerfully and unanimously made.

We would renew the recommendation. The sum of two thousand dollars, voted by the government and which has been expended by the Trustees, has met the demands made upon us for its security and management, and allowed a small but satisfactory outlay for its maintenance and increase. It is believed that all desirable economy has been observed by the Trustees in arranging for the necessary expenses of the Library, and that the selection of books has been governed by a single eye to the interest of those for whose benefit they have been purchased. While care has been taken that no publication injurious to the public morals should find a place upon our shelves, we have endeav-

ored to divest ourselves, in our efforts to place before our fellow-citizens the means of "a more extensive and genial culture," of all narrow and sectarian partialities. In this respect, we are gratified to be able to state that no difference of opinion has for a single moment interrupted the harmony and unanimity of our proceedings. Every member of the Board has kept constantly in view the fact, that he had been called upon to discharge an important public duty, and that within the limits of that comprehensive circle wherein are found the wise and good of all classes, ranks, parties and sects, he was to know nothing in the performance of that duty, but the benefit and improvement of all. The publications upon our tables, as well as the books we have been enabled to place upon our shelves, will, it is believed, afford ample evidence of the controlling presence of this all important principle of action.

A large number of books purchased by the Trustees the past year, have been recent publications. So numerous has been the issue of new books, that a careful selection of such of them as seems to demand a place upon our shelves, has necessarily absorbed a large proportion of the limited amount of means at our disposal. And this must, it is supposed, continue to be the case. The public claim the right to demand of the managers of the Library access to the new publications as they issue from the press. This demand is reasonable and proper, and within reasonable limits, should be met promptly and liberally. The Trustees have, as they hope and believe, come up to the public expectation in this particular. All the new and desirable books they have not been able to obtain; but many and perhaps a majority of such as have a claim to a position in our collection have been purchased,

and while this demand, made by the public and recognized by the managers, has been met to an extent which has satisfied both the public want and the judgment of the Board, a margin has been left for the addition to our limited store of those older publications which make up the true wealth of every extensive Library. Every year it is to be hoped that some progress may be made in this direction. The fact should never be lost sight of, that our collection, valuable and extensive as it is, is yet very incomplete in many of the most important departments of human learning. A small amount of the appropriation annually made for the Library, devoted to the purchase of the standard books of the language not yet upon our shelves, will gradually supply this deficiency, and thus give to our inhabitants access to the rich treasures of wisdom and knowledge which have been left to us as a legacy by the "mighty dead," while they enjoy and improve the opportunities afforded them for holding intercourse with the living mind of the world.

While the Board would express themselves satisfied with the appropriation which was last year voted to the "support, maintenance and increase" of the Public Library, and believe that the sum of two thousand dollars for the next year will be sufficient to sustain it in a creditable and useful position, they feel bound to call the attention of the City government to the fact that more extensive and securer apartments are demanded for its accommodation.

The rooms now occupied by the Library are limited and unsafe. The public need better accommodations, and the books a safer depository. Our rooms are often too crowded for safety, comfort or convenience. Our books, now a large and valuable collection, are

every moment exposed to destruction. We feel bound to state these facts without circumlocution or qualification.

The public good in its highest and most comprehensive meaning, demands, in our opinion, a depository for the Public Library, more extensive and more secure. The value of the books it contains, and the position it now occupies in the public mind, claim for it the means of a safer and more advantageous arrangement for its keeping and its use. In what way shall these objects so desirable, may we not say indispensable, be obtained? How shall this great and imminent public want be met?

Could we hope that success would attend upon our appeals, we would point to Worcester, to Boston, to Danvers, to New York, to Philadelphia, and many other places where wealth has been ennobled by a devotion of a portion of its abundance to the erection of magnificent edifices for this purpose, and call upon those who are among us, or are of us, the men and the women who have been nourished within our borders, and who have here or elsewhere been made rich by an activity and enterprise having this city for its centre, to come forward, emulative of this noble example, and give to us a building for our Library which would not suffer from a comparison with those, which, in the places we have named have been devoted, by a princely liberality, to the cause of knowledge and virtue.

And why should we doubt of success? Are we mistaken in the belief that there are men and women among us, who, with the possession of large means are also blessed with large hearts? It were a libel upon the fair fame of our city to suppose, that there is not among our people of wealth, a fair share of that

public spirit and benevolent activity which have prompted to the acts which have given a proud and honored prominence to the name of Bates and Peabody, Salisbury and Astor.

It is true, that thus far in our history, there have been but few examples of the presence of that feeling which has prompted to those acts of princely liberality to which we have alluded.

As yet, but few monuments of this kind tell the story of such an enlightened devotedness to the general welfare.

Not that our citizens have been wanting when a call has been made upon them in the name of divine charity, for the relief of the destitute and neglected. The demands of benevolence have always been met, and a large and generous bounty has ever characterized the acts of our people, when a tale of suffering has reached their ears.

Princely have been our expenditures for the education of our youth, and the appropriations for this noble purpose have been as cheerfully accorded as they have been ample in amount.

The same generous and enlightened spirit, roused into activity in behalf of the institution whose interests are so intimately connected with the well-being of our people and the fair fame of our city, would, we are assured, secure for it the advantages of a safe, commodious and tasteful building.

The public spirit and well directed benevolence which shall rear a convenient and ornamental structure for our Free Public Library, will secure for the name of him who shall be the honored instrument in the accomplishment of such an undertaking, an enviable and enduring reputation.

The work belongs to one or more of the wealthy, enlightened and benevolent inhabitants of our city. Are we mistaken in supposing that there are those among us, who, desirous of devoting a portion of the wealth which Providence has bestowed upon them, to the public good, and prompted by a laudable ambition to give such a direction to their munificence as will secure to them the gratitude of their fellow-citizens and the regard of posterity, will erect a monument so noble in its purpose, so elevating in its results? No doubtful or limited benefit would attend upon the consummation of such an undertaking. Without restriction or qualification will be accorded to him the title of PUBLIC BENEFACTOR, who shall thus generously and benevolently allow his name to designate the structure which shall be reared for the purpose of our FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY.

But we are digressing. We have allowed the hopes and anticipations of personal feeling to lead us away from a legitimate discharge of our duty as stewards of a public trust. As Trustees of the Public Library, it is not for us, in our communications to the body from which we derive our official existence and authority, to depart from the limited range of remark and recommendation to which such a position should confine us.

Returning then to the subject of a more safe and convenient depository for our books, and to such a restricted view of it as properly belongs to the relation we bear to your body and to the public, we would earnestly press upon the consideration of the municipal government such a course in relation to it, as will secure the important objects we have named—increased accommodation and greater safety.

The Board have not been unmindful of their own

duties in this respect. They have had constantly pressing upon them the inconvenience and danger of our existing arrangements. Under such circumstances they have felt bound to give attention to the subject and take such action in relation to it as their official responsibility appeared to demand.

Not regarding the erection of a new building as at present an attainable object, they have been led to the examination of the City Hall with a view to the accommodation of the Library in the lower story of that safe, central, and beautiful building.

The action taken by the Board upon the subject has already been communicated to the City Council, and is now before your body awaiting its determination.

It may not be improper, in view of the present position of the subject before the Council, and as constituting a part of the proceedings of the Board, to place before you that part of our records which embrace the report of a committee to whom it was referred.

It was in the month of June last, that a committee which had been charged with the subject made in relation to it the following report.

“The committee to whom was referred the subject of safe and more convenient rooms for the accommodation of the Free Public Library, have given some attention to the subject, and would now beg leave respectfully to report.

“It has always been supposed by the Trustees, that the room now occupied by the Library, would afford us but temporary accommodations. We have from the beginning, looked forward to the time when the City government would take measures for providing a permanent and secure place for the Library, and more convenient and accessible accommodations for the large

and increasing number of citizens who visit it for books and for the purpose of study and recreation.

“The rooms now occupied by the Library were the best that could be procured at the time we commenced our operations. But there are many and very important objections to them; and the Committee are clear in the conviction that it was the duty of the Board, without further delay, to institute proceedings having in view a removal to a *permanent, safe and convenient* location.

1.—“The rooms are too small for the accommodation of the Library. But few more books can be conveniently arranged upon our shelves. The accommodations for those who visit the Library to read or study, are very limited. It is desirable that a Reading Room should be provided, separate from the depository for the books. At times the room is very much crowded, and much inconvenience is the result, particularly to the females.

2.—“The building is unsafe. As a proof of this, we need only to mention the fact, that the rate of insurance now paid by the City, upon the property in the Library, is three per cent. per annum, the highest rate of premium, it is believed, charged upon any kind of risk. It is getting more and more unsafe. At this time there is not, perhaps, a more exposed situation in our City. An application is now before the Mayor and Aldermen, for leave to establish and maintain a steam engine in a building in close proximity with that which contains the Library.*

“Notwithstanding our property is partially insured, the fact that our large and valuable Library is constantly liable to be destroyed by fire, is a source of deep and continued anxiety. There are many books in our col-

*Since granted.

lection which money cannot obtain; and the sum insured could not restore to us a Library any thing like so valuable. But a short time after we had taken possession of our rooms, the building containing them took fire, and a few moments delay in its discovery would have resulted in the entire destruction of the Library. The committee are deeply impressed with the magnitude of this danger, and they would endeavor to impress upon the minds of the Trustees the importance of taking immediate measures to relieve this valuable property from the hazard to which it is exposed.

"The committee have understood that the attention of the municipal authorities has already been directed to the subject.

"The danger to which our property is exposed, the inadequate accommodations the present rooms afford, and a conviction that an arrangement could be made by which a remedy would be provided for both these evils, and, at the same time, a saving made to the city treasury, have led to the examination of this subject on the part of the City government.

"It is believed by your committee, that all this can be done.

"It has been proposed to devote that part of the basement story of the City Hall, now used for a market, to the purpose of a Free Public Library, and the School Library.

"The rooms have been examined by the committee who unite in the opinion that they are well calculated for the purpose.

"Ample arrangements could be made, within the space occupied by the market-stalls, for the safe and convenient accommodation of the books now in the Library, and for any desirable increase for several years

to come, while the visitors, either for books or for study, could be much better provided for than is at present possible.

“The committee do not feel at liberty to go beyond this simple statement. It does not belong to them to enter into an examination of that policy, which has hitherto led the municipal authorities in all our large towns and cities to provide accommodation for the venders of meats and vegetables.

“It may not, however, be improper for them to remark, that the policy is now less generally pursued than formerly, and that many of our large cities are seriously debating the question of an entire change.

“It is becoming pretty well understood that there is no imperative obligation resting upon the public authorities to provide places of business for the dealers in ‘beef and greens.’ The question is asked, ‘why not flour as well as meat—tea, coffee and sugar, as well as turnips, cabbages and spinage?’ A change in this respect is not a matter of speculation alone.

“It is rapidly taking place without the action of authority. Meat shops are multiplying in all our large cities, and within the limits of our own, there are, at this time, more than twenty stores occupied by the dealers in the articles heretofore found almost exclusively at the public market.

“Should an investigation of this subject satisfy our City government, that it is neither necessary or expedient for the public to provide places of business for one class of traders more than another, and that the traders in beef and beans, veal and vegetables, can, without inconvenience to the public, be allowed to make their own business arrangements, the spacious basement of the City Hall, now, for the most part devoted to

the market could be fitted up for the purposes of the City. No better accommodations for the Library could be found or desired. It would be safe and central. The books would be secure and accessible. Economy and convenience would both be promoted by the change."

The statements and recommendations of the report are respectfully commended to your favorable notice. Should the suggestions therein contained, lead the City Council to take further action upon the subject, it will become the duty of the Board, to the extent of their ability, to aid in any effort that may be made, to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

We give, with great pleasure, the list of those friends of the Library and of Literature, who have, during the past year, been thoughtful of our claims to their attention and regard.

We have received books and other publications from the following:

Asa R. Nye, Esq., Mrs. Eliza G. Wood, Hon. J. H. W. Page, Secretary of the State of New York, Hon. Thomas D. Eliot, A. J. Phipps, Esq., Trustees of the Public Library, Boston, Mrs. H. G. O. Colby, Smithsonian Institute, Charles Mason, Esq., Charles Russell, Trustees of the Theological Seminary, Andover, D. C. Brown, Esq., Trustees of the Pennsylvania Hospital, Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbridge, George M. Bunker, Esq., William Logan Rodman, Esq.

We desire in this public manner to acknowledge the receipt from the celebrated engravers, Messrs. Topham, Carpenter, Casilear & Co., of New York, a beautiful engraving of the City Seal, and a heading for the correspondence of the Trustees. This exquisite specimen of Art, so useful and ornamental, is highly regarded by

us, not only for the skill with which it is wrought, but for the liberality which bestowed it upon the Free Public Library.

The whole number of volumes now in the Library, is about eight thousand.

Of this number there have been added during the past year about one thousand.

The small balance which will appear to the credit of the Library, on the books of the City Treasurer, has been anticipated by expenditures, the bills of which have not yet been presented.

All of which is respectfully presented.

RODNEY FRENCH,

Mayor of the City, and, ex-officio,

Pres't of the Board of Trustees.

ABNER J. PHIPPS, Sec'y.

